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ABSTRACT

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is a society that evaluates special education programs in the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) process. This study surveyed the 179 colleges and universities approved for accreditation by the CEC and sampled procedures the CEC-approved special eduation programs were using to appraise the end-of-major competencies of preservice teachers. In addition, an interest in portfolio assessment at the college level prompted related questions about whether special education programs were incorporating portfolios into the assessment process. Approximately 80 percent of the surveys were returned for analysis. According to the findings, it was apparent that a variety of assessment methods were considered to be acceptable by the CEC; that approximately one-third of the CEC-approved special education programs indicated an involvement in, or a movement toward, portfolios as an end-of-major assessment component; and that the most common assessment practice was some form of testing at the close of special education coursework. A discussion of the trends in end-of-major assessment as evidenced by the results of the survey, a copy of the survey questionnaire, and graphic displays of responses to survey questions complete the document. (LL)

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End-of-Major Assessment Practices in CEC-Approved Teacher-Preparation Programs

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Abstract

Surveys were sent to 179 colleges and universities that met CEC's undergraduate special education accreditation standards to determine end-of-major assessment procedures. Approximately 80% of the surveys were returned for analysis. A summary of the findings is presented, followed by a discussion of the trends in end-of-major assessment as evidenced in the results.

End-of-Major Assessment Practices in CEC-Approved Teacher-Preparation Programs

Public questioning of higher education has, in part., focused on assessment of what college students really learn (Resnick, 1987). For example, in a brief review of popular-press commentaries on college assessment practices, Erwin states "behind these questions about assessment lie deep-rooted concerns about the quality of higher education--concerns expressed by parents seeking greater value for their tuition dollars, and by legislators, governors, and other government officials who want to know more about how well education is doing its job" (1991, p.1). Such observations should be a concern to professionals who are involved in teacher preparation (Payne, Vowell, & Black, 1991), and have prompted suggestions that faculty reevaluate existing practices and increase their accountability in the assessment process (Association of American Colleges, 1985).

Assessment expectations at NCATE-approved institutions are clear. For example, NCATE's Standard III.D states that "The unit ensures that the academic and professional competence of education students is assessed prior to granting recommendations for certification and/or graduation" (1992, p. 55). Learned societies have also contributed to the discussion by identifying competencies that students should master in their professional education sequence. In special education, CEC recently approved a common core of knowledge that special education graduates should demonstrate before moving from college classroom to special education classroom (1992). While end-of-major evaluations are clearly prescribed, how professional programs evaluate education students' competence remains the prerogative of each institution.

Appropriate assessment practices can ensure that the graduates of a program acquire the necessary competencies to work effectively with students with special

needs. Such procedures provide feedback to college faculty who are involved in teacher preparation (Bunda, 1991). Such feedback can improve programs in several ways: allocating scarce dollars, selecting practicum and student teaching sites and faculty, modifying curricula to meet changing needs of schools, and retraining faculty.

As the learned society that evaluates special education programs in the NCATE process, CEC has considerable leverage in determining how such programs are implemented. Recently, in their journal, Exceptional Children, CEC listed the names of 179 institutions of higher learning that had programs which met the learned society's accreditation standards (CEC News, 1993). This study surveyed CEC-approved colleges and universities regarding the end-of-major assessment practices that each had in place for their special education students. An interest in portfolio assessment at the college level (Arter & Spandel, 1992; Stahle & Mitchell, 1993; Valeri-Gold, Olson, & Deming, 1991-2) prompted related questions about whether special education programs were incorporating portfolios as part of the end-of-major assessment process and, if so, what components were included in the portfolios.

Method

Procedure

In March of 1993, a brief survey (see Figure 1) was sent by Central Washington

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Insert Figure 1 about here.

University's Department of Institutional Assessment to special education faculties at each of the colleges and universities listed in Exceptional Children (59[3]) as having been accredited by CEC. Approximately two months later, a follow-up letter was sent to the faculties at schools that did not respond to the original survey. Of 177 surveys, 141 (79.6%) were returned for analysis. From this pool of respondents a group of 19

were removed because the respondents indicated that their programs had no undergraduate special education component. The final pool of responses consisted of 122 surveys (68.9% of the original CEC listing).

Results

The first survey question sought to determine if the "undergraduate special education program requires a formal end-of-major assessment process beyond a) passing courses, and b) successfully completing student teaching to receive a teaching certificate." Figure 2 shows that of the institutions with undergraduate programs who responded (n=122), 68 (55.7%) answered that their program included this "formal" end-of-major assessment procedure; 54 (44.3%) answered "no."

Insert Figures 2-5 about here.

Although only a little more than half of the institutions reported a specific end-of-major assessment procedure in their program (question 1), 90 of 120 respondents (75%) to question 2 indicated that a test was required of students at the end of their undergraduate program, either within or without the program structure; 30 respondents indicated no such end-of-major testing, and 2 respondents failed to answer this question. (See Figure 3.) As Figure 4 indicates, respondents who said that their students took a test at program's end (n=90) indicated in question 2A that the tests were based on state standards (n=77, 85.5%), department/college standards (n=8, 9%), department/college and state standards (n=3, 3.3%), or NTE scores (n=2, 2.2%).

Questions 2A and 2B were related. Respondent who indicated that tests were based on state standards (n=77) subsequently indicated on question 2B that evaluation was done by the state (n=24), by the department/college (n=24), by the NTE testing service (n=9), or by the department/college and state (n=5) (15 surveys

had no response item 2B). (See Figure 5.) Those who did not indicate that their end-of-major test was based on state standards (n=13) said that their evaluation was done by the group who set the standards, respectively. For example, when the department/college set standards, then it was the department/college that conducted the evaluation of whether the standards were met.

Question 3 asked if "students are required to complete an end-of-major portfolio of their work to receive an endorsement for a teaching certificate." Of the 122 survey questionnaires, 84 (68.9%) indicated no such requirement, 29 (23.8%) said a portfolio was required, and 9 (7.3%) indicated an intention to develop a portfolio requirement in the near future. (See Figure 6.) Figure 7 indicates that the portfolio requirements for the 29 institutions that required one were set by department/college (n=22), state (n=3), and individual faculty members (n=1) (3 surveys had no response to this question). Results of this question indicated that the portfolio evaluation was done by department/college (n=15), student-teaching supervisor (n=5), advisor (n=3), a committee (n=2), state (n=1), and the student (n=1) (no response on 2 of the questionnaires). (See Figure 8.)

Insert Figures 6-9 about here.

Finally, the survey attempted to determine the components of the portfolio for those institutions that used this end-of-major assessment format. Figure 9 shows that of the 29 responses that indicated a portfolio component in the preservice program, 18 required an IEP from practicum or student-teaching involvement; lesson plans were required at 28 institutions; 26 required assessment write-ups, and 22 included a curriculum adaptation.

Discussion

The results of this survey identify the requirements that CEC-approved special education programs have for their undergraduate programs. There was no way to determine the number of non respondents (n=36) who have graduate programs versus undergraduate programs. However, based on our response rate (79.6%) the results of this survey are fairly indicative of undergraduate special education programs that have received CEC approval as of early 1993.

The summary data indicate that approximately three-quarters of the approved institutions reported a test of state-determined standards at the close of the undergraduate special education program. However, fewer department/college programs reported an internal end-of-major assessment as part of their program. Department/college standards, and a combination of department/college and state standards, accounted for almost all of the standard-setting procedures. Only 2 of the 90 institutions reported setting specific NTE cutoff standards.

Responsibility for evaluating whether specific state standards were achieved during the teacher preparation was distributed equally among the department/college and the state (31.2% each), and a combination of these agencies (6.5%) for a total of approximately two-thirds of the responses. Excluding the 19.5% of respondents who did not indicate the agencies that evaluate such end-of-major assessment data, 11.6% indicated that NTE evaluators were used for this purpose. Based on the survey results, state agencies and higher-education institutions appear to share primary responsibilities for determining end-of-major state-determined qualifications of preservice teachers. When those end-of-major qualifications are indicated to be based on NTE scores, department/college standards, or department/college/state standards, the agencies that set these criteria were reported as the evaluators of whether the standards were met.

Only 29 (24.2%) of the 120 respondents who answered this question said that they had a portfolio assessment process in place for preservice special education teacher preparation; another 9 respondents who indicated that portfolios were "on the horizon" would bring this total to 31.1 percent. Based on these data, the minority of CEC-approved institutions utilize a portfolio process to evaluate their special education preservice teachers.

For the one-fourth of CEC-approved special education programs that do use a portfolio to evaluate student performance, some common components are included. That is, 62.1 percent included demonstration of an ability to write an IEP; 96.6 percent of the group required the inclusion of lesson plans; 89.7 percent included a write-up that was based on an assessment that the preservice teacher had done; and 75.9 percent of the respondents indicated that students would include an adaptation of a curriculum in their portfolio. Anecdotal comments by the respondents indicated other components in the portfolio, including the following: Videotapes of teaching, a philosophy statement, a resume, descriptions of critical incidents during practicum, a home-school involvement plan, an inclusion plan, classroom-management plans, and supervisory observations.

Conclusion

It was our intention in this study to sample the procedures that CEC-approved special education programs were using to appraise competencies of preservice teachers. Based on this survey, it is apparent that a variety of assessment methods are considered to be acceptable by CEC. For the most part, special education programs require the meeting of specific state standards in the form of passing some type of a test. To a lesser degree, programs contain an evaluation test that is based on state and department/college standards.

While the survey allowed for "student teaching" and "passing courses" to be considered evaluative experiences in the preservice program, it was surprising that approximately one-fourth of the respondents indicated that there was no formal end-of-major assessment procedure in place. Several writers commented that assessment is an ongoing, rather than an end-of-major, procedure in their programs. For example, "All of these items are evaluated as part of program not an end of experience folio;" "We routinely collect data but it is done as they progress through the program;" and "We are 'Quality' oriented and build quality into our courses so there is no need to inspect at the end."

Considering movement toward "authentic" assessment practices in education communities, the finding that approximately one-third of the CEC-approved special education programs indicated an involvement in, or a movement toward, portfolios as an end-of-major assessment component was unexpected. Rather, the results indicated that the most common practice was some form of testing at the close of special education coursework. The results of this survey should prompt discussions of the strengths and weaknesses of different end-of-major assessment procedures in the preparation of special education teachers.

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Figure Caption

Figure 1. Survey questionnaire.

End-of-major assessment questionnaire

1. Our undergraduate special education program requires a formal end-of-major assessment beyond a) completion of prescribed courses and b) satisfactory completion of student teaching to receive a teaching certificate?
___ Yes___ No

2. Students are required to take an end-of-major test (e.g., NTE, State Teacher Examination, Comprehensives)?
___ Yes___ No

If you answered "yes" to #2,

A. ...criterion performance is set by _____
(e.g., department standards, state standards)

B....criterion performance is evaluated by _____
(e.g., departmental committee, college committee)

3. Students are required to complete an end-of-major portfolio of their work to receive an endorsement for a teaching certificate?
___ Yes___ No

If yes,

A. ...criterion performance is set by whom _____
B....criterion performance is evaluated by whom _____
C....please describe the materials that are included in the student's portfolio:

___ Sample IEP from practicum/student teaching
___ Example of lesson plans and associated materials from practicum/student teaching
___ Assessment write-up from practicum/student teaching
___ Curriculum adaptations from practicum/ student teaching
___ Other (please list on reverse side)

(If your division/department/college uses a portfolio checklist, please attach to questionnaire.)

4. Identification data
Name of Institution _____
Annual number of graduates in special education_____
Responder _____ Position _____ Phone _____

Use the reverse side of this questionnaire for comments.

Figure Caption

Figure 2. Response to survey question 1.

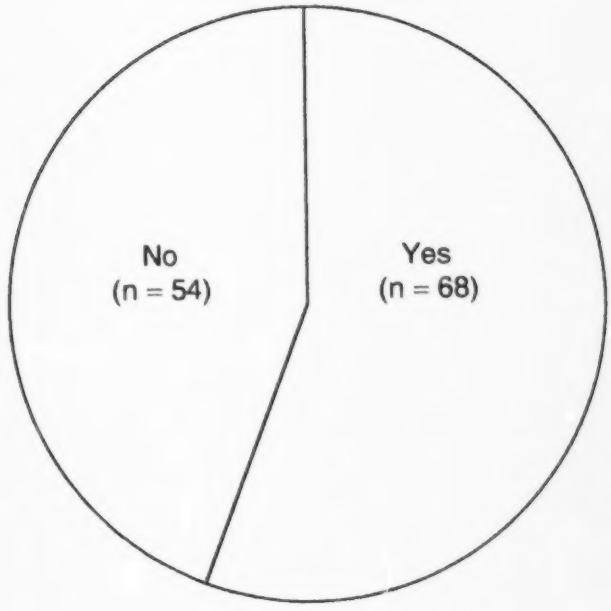
No
(n = 54)
Yes
(n = 68)

Figure Caption

Figure 3. Response to survey question 2.

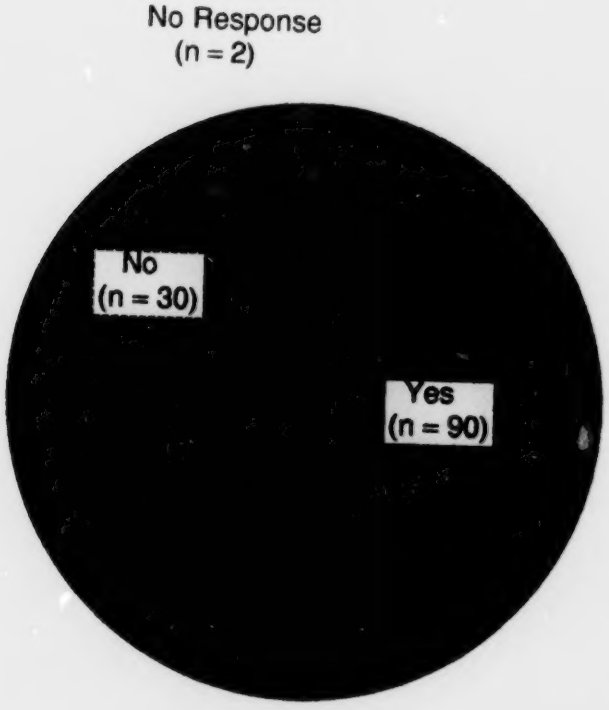

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Figure Caption

Figure 4. Response to survey question 2A.

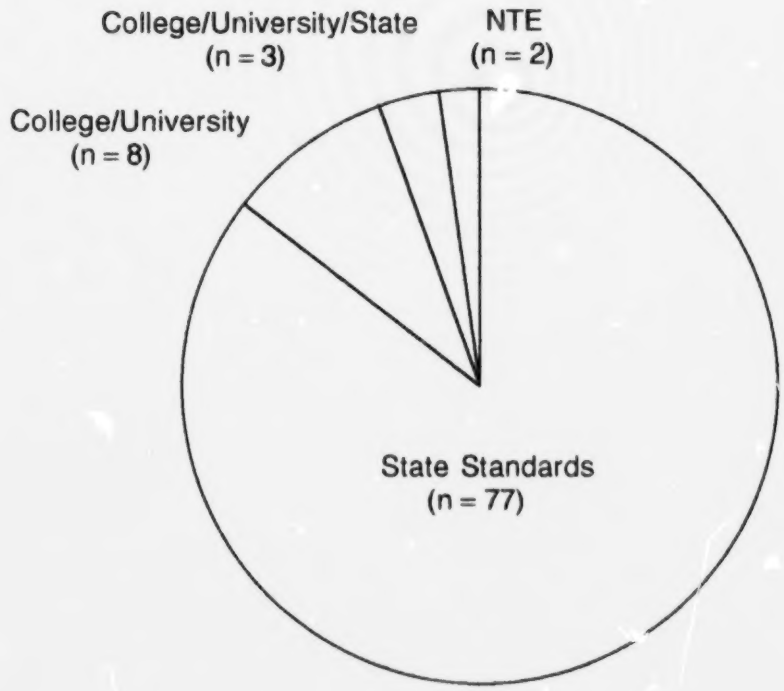
College/University/State
(n = 3)
NTE
(n = 2)
College/University
(n = 8)
State Standards
(n = 77)

Figure Caption

Figure 5. Response to survey question 2B.

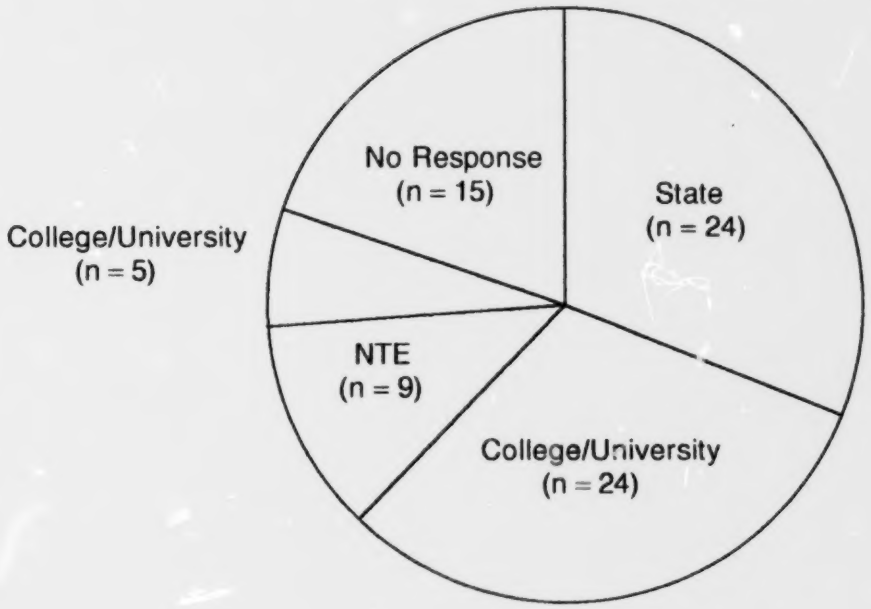
No Response
(n = 15)
State
(n = 24)
College/University
(n = 5)
NTE
(n = 9)
College/University
(n = 24)

Figure Caption

Figure 6. Response to survey question 3.

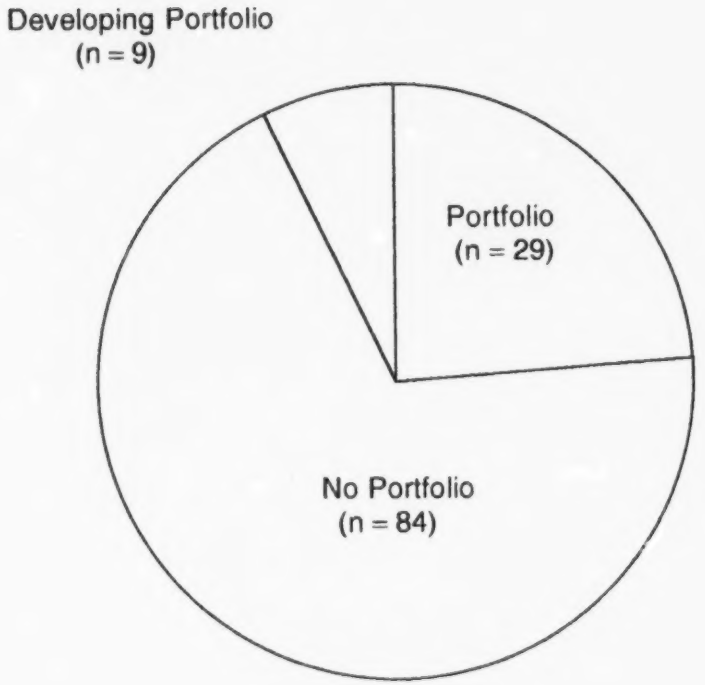
Developing Portfolio
(n = 9)
Portfolio
(n = 29)
No Portfolio
(n = 84)

Figure Caption

Figure 7. Response to survey question 3A.

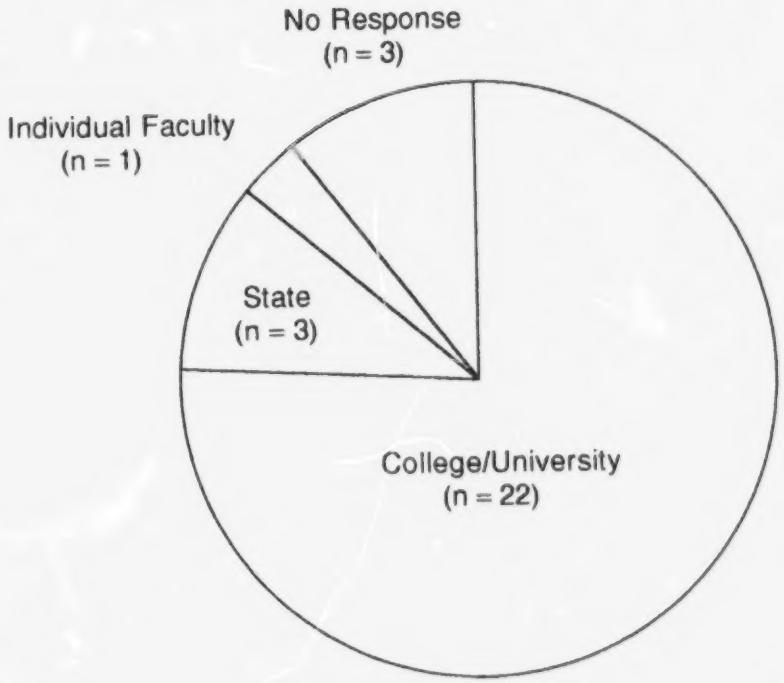
No Response
(n = 3)
Individual Faculty
(n = 1)
State
(n = 3)
College/University
(n = 22)

Figure Caption

Figure 8. Response to survey question 3B.

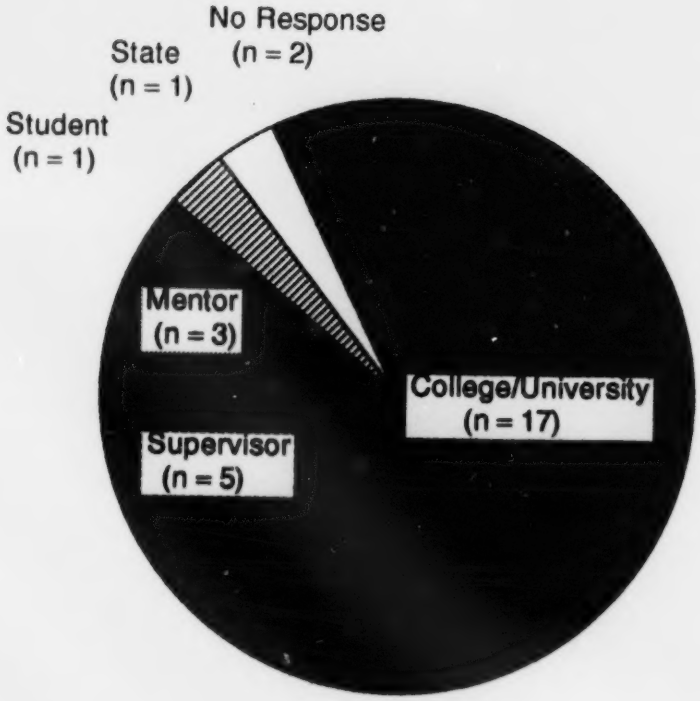

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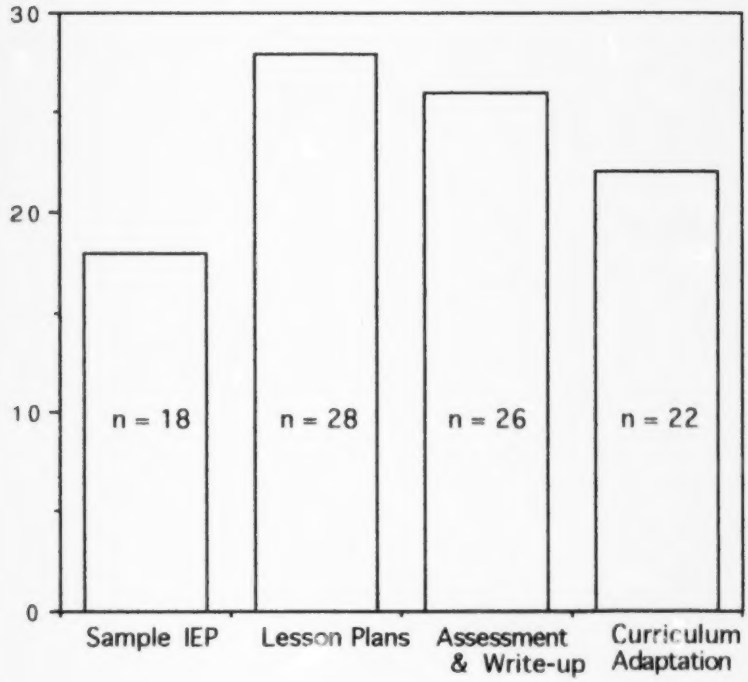
Figure Caption

Figure 9. Response to survey question 3C.


30
20
10
0
n = 18
n = 28
n = 26
n = 22
Sample IEP
Lesson Plans
Assessment & Write-up
Curriculum Adaptation